1 JUL 1969

Laird, Melvin
C.I.A. Helms, Richard
C.I.A. 1.03 Kirkpatrick, Lyman
C.I.A 7.01
C.I.A. 3.03465R
Soc. 401.2 The Real CIA

WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP

Is Laird Briefing Us Too Much?

By ORR KELLY

Ever since he moved into the Pentagon last Janurary, Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird has been pouring out an almost steady stream of previously secret information about the Soviet Union.

He has talked about the SS9 missile, tests in the Pacific of some form of multiple warhead for the SS9, the rate at which the Russians are deploying intercontinental missiles and the rate at which they are building submarines.

In the process, he has been accused for saying too much, of saying too little and of distorting the intelligence estimates of the Central Intelligence Agency to bolster his case for a missile defense system.

How much validity is there to these criticisms?

Of the three, the least likely to be valid is the criticism that Laird's appraisal of Soviet capabilities in the future differs from the official National Intelligence Estimate, because the procedure by which the NIE is arrived at specifically provides for dissenting views, which become part of the estimate.

As part of his job as the principal foreign intelligence adviser to the President, Richard Helms, the director of central intelligence, is responsible for preparation of the NIE.

★

The process starts with the President or a request from the National Security Council for an estimate on some problem of foreign intelligence. The request goes to the Board of National Estimates, which reports directly to Helms as director of central intelligence.

The members of the 12-man board or their staff get together with representatives of the Defense and State Departments and other agencies that might be involved and divide up the work. When the drafts come back from the various agencies, a member of the board's staff puts them together in preparation for a series of meetings by the board.

When they have finished their work, Helms takes the report to the U.S. Intelligence Board, of which he is chairman. The board includes representatives of the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, the State Department's Office of Intelligence Research, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

★

"One of the beauties of the system is that there is a complete sharing of all information among the agencies, so that everybody is working from the same set of facts," Lyman B. Kirkpatrick Jr., former executive director of the CIA, wrote in his book on "The Real CIA."

Planning for military purposes normally goes beyond the NIE to what is known as the "greater-than-expected-threat." In other words, plans are normally made for the worst that might happen rather than for what appears likely to happen—even if the Pentagon agrees with the NIE. Because of the long time it takes to develop and produce new weapons, military planning also normally reaches out beyond the time in which the NIE has any real certainty.

The criticism that Laird is saying both too much and too little has more basis in fact.

So far as the intelligence community is concerned, it would be happy if no one ever said anything about what has been learned about the activities of other countries, friend or foe.

Part of the problem is that any revelation of what we know—or think we know—lets a potential enemy know how much we know and how accurate our information is.

An even more serious part of the problem is that any revelation could expose the sources of information. This is the area in which intelligence officials are most touchy because it can endanger the effectiveness and even the lives of intelligence agents.

On the other hand, Laird may well be telling us less than we need to know for a fully objective look at the threat posed by the Soviet Union.

He has said, for example, that the Russians are testing a multiple warhead on the SS9 and that the warheads seem to fall in a pattern corresponding to the way our Minuteman missiles are deployed. This information comes from a destroyer waiting out in the Pacific near the impact area.

But what if he has additional information—as he almost surely does—that comes from sources less obvious than a destroyer. Is he free to make that public, too, without seriously endangering sources of information? Probably not.

★

This is a problem that has been with us for a long time and one that we can never wholly avoid.

People in the government at the policy-making level are going to try to use as much information as they can to prove the wisdom of what they have decided to do—as the administration is now doing in the case of the Safeguard missile defense system.

But no one—and especially none of the critics of what the administration has set out to do—can ever be satisfied that the information being made public is, if not the whole truth, at least a close approximation of the truth.